

Badger



# Nature's Call

An Activity Newsletter for Kids by Utah's Project WILD--Winter 2000

Striped Skunk



## Utah's Musky Mammals

What do weasels, badgers, otters and skunks have in common? They are all mammals that can smell really bad! That's because they all carry musk. Musk is a thick, oily, yellowish fluid with a very potent musky odor. It is stored in special scent glands found at the base of the tail. Musk is used by the musky mammals to mark their territories. They also use it for defense. Anyone who has ever had their dog come home after meeting up with a skunk surely knows how bad musk can stink.

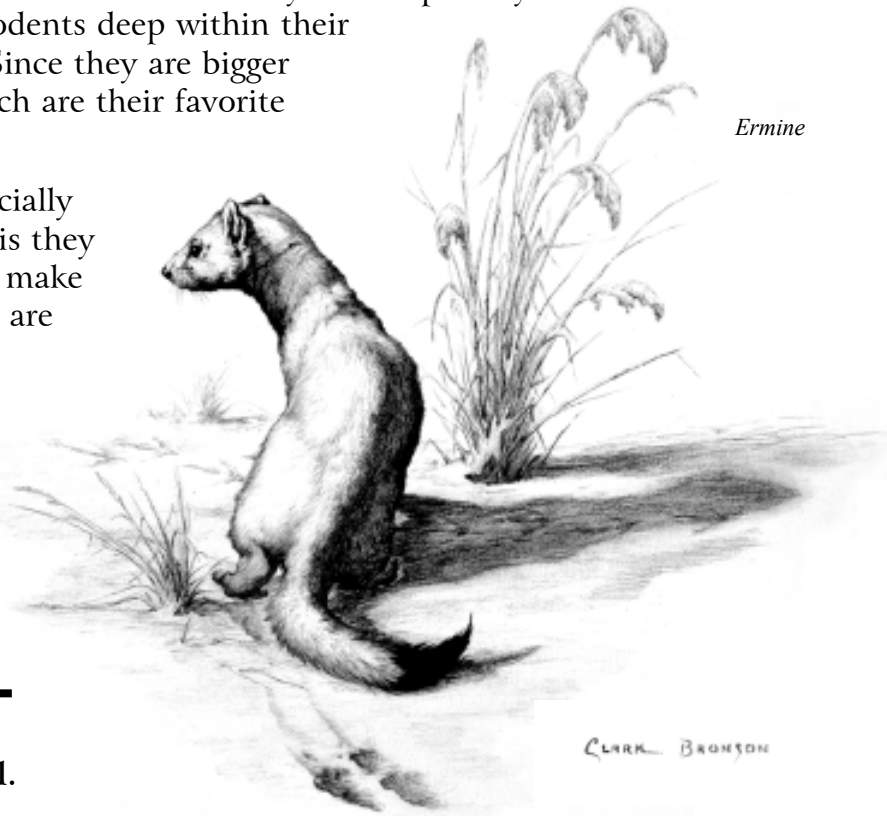
The musky mammals are a very large and diverse group of mammals. They are native to all continents except Antarctica and Australia and live in a variety of different habitats. All, except skunks, belong to a group called the *Mustelidae*. Other members of this group not listed above include ferrets, polecats, martens, mink, fishers and the wolverine. Skunks used to belong to this group too but now scientists put them in their own family called the *Mephitidae*. This change was based on studies of their DNA. These studies showed that skunks were not as closely related to the other musky mammals as once thought.

In general, all the musky mammals are similar in shape. They all have long bodies and short legs. This allows them to be very quick and agile. They also all have sharp teeth and claws typical of carnivores. These adaptations all together make them especially good predators. They usually hunt at night, using their excellent sense of smell to track down their prey.

Although all the musky mammals produce musk and are similar in shape, they come in a variety of sizes and colors that make them each unique. Weasels, the smallest of the lot, are among the few mammals that turn white in the winter. They have especially long bodies that allow them to capture rodents deep within their burrows. Ferrets too have long bodies. Since they are bigger though they can capture prairie dogs which are their favorite prey.

Mink and martens are covered with especially long, soft and lustrous fur. Because of this they have been trapped throughout history to make fur coats. Badgers, with extra long claws, are noted for their amazing digging abilities. Otters, the swimmers of the bunch, have webbed toes, dense insulating fur, streamlined bodies and large lungs that let them dive quite well. And skunks, the black and white critters that most of us can easily recognize, are the ones famous for their musk spraying method of defense.

Ermine



CLARK BRONSON

Discover more about Utah's Musky Mammals in this issue of Nature's Call.

# Musky Mammal Match!

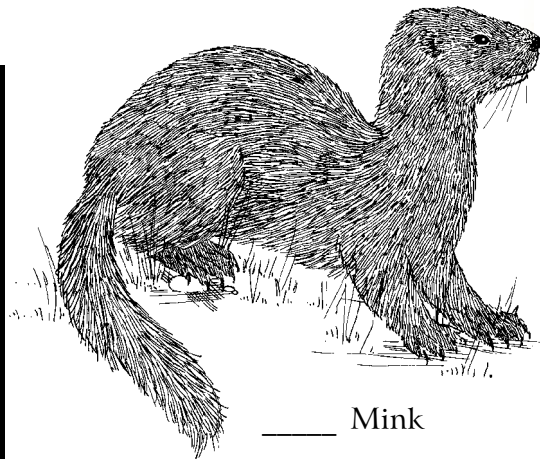
Quite a few musky mammals make their home in Utah: two types of skunks, the striped skunk and the spotted skunk; the badger; two weasels, the long-tailed weasel and the ermine (once called the short-tailed weasel); the pine marten, a good tree climber; mink which have long been trapped for their fine lush fur; and the river otter, the most aquatic of the musky mammals. Wolverines which were thought to be extinct in our state (extirpated) have been seen in a few high mountain areas as well. And, the endangered black-footed ferret, the rarest mammal in North America, was recently brought back to the northeastern part of Utah.

Although all of the musky mammals produce musk and have a similar body shape - short legs and an elongated body - each is unique in its own way. Each comes in a different size (although females are usually smaller than the males), they each have different fur colors and patterns, they all live in different habitats and have differing lifestyles.

Read the clues that describe some of the different musky mammals that are found in Utah. Then, try to match the correct description with their picture below. Look in a mammal field guide for help too. When you have matched all the musky mammals with their descriptions, color them in. Have fun learning about Utah's Musky Mammals!



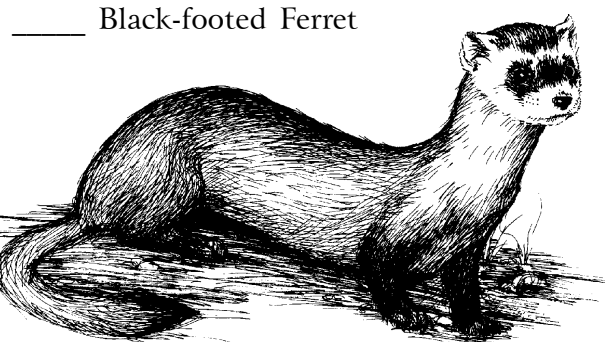
\_\_\_\_ Pine Marten



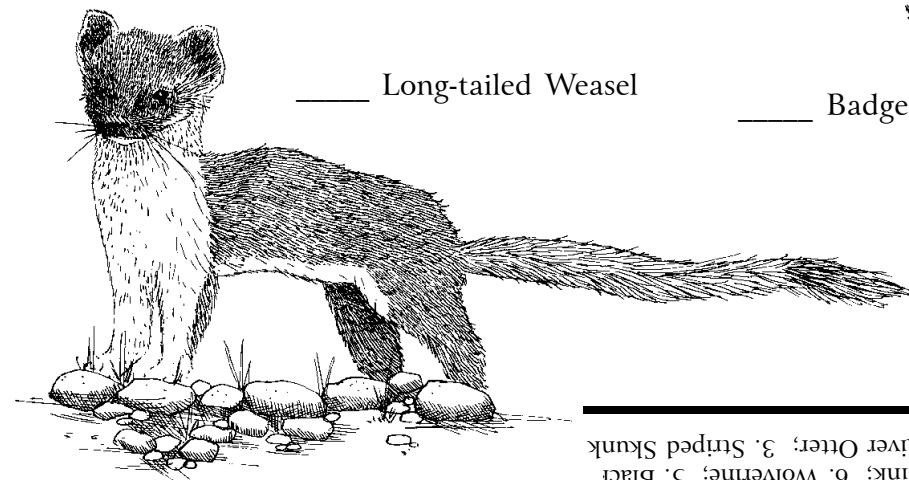
\_\_\_\_ Mink



\_\_\_\_ Wolverine



\_\_\_\_ Black-footed Ferret



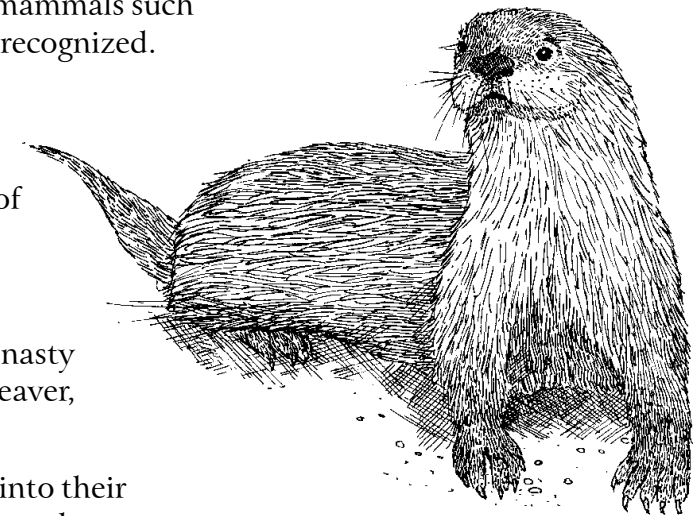
\_\_\_\_ Long-tailed Weasel



\_\_\_\_ Badger



\_\_\_\_ Striped Skunk



\_\_\_\_ River Otter

## Musky Mammal Descriptive Clues: (Put the matching number in the space by each musky mammal.)

1. I am a musky mammal that spends much of the time in rivers and streams. I like to dive deep to feed on fish, frogs and crayfish. To help me swim and dive I have a streamlined body, thick dark brown insulating fur, and large lungs that help me hold my breath for a long time.
2. I have two inch long claws on my fore feet and strong limbs that make me the musty mammal that is best at digging. I dig small mammals such as ground squirrels and pocket gophers right out of their burrows. I have black and white markings on my face that make me easily recognized.
3. I am the musky mammal with the black and white stripes. You have probably smelled me more often than you have seen me. That's because I spray my must to defend myself and the smell can carry up to a half a mile away?
4. I am a musky mammal that climbs in trees alot. Here I can easily capture my favorite prey, red squirrels. I am about the size of housecat and am covered with silky dark golden brown fur. I also have an amber colored throat patch.
5. I am the musky mammal that almost became extinct. I wear a black mask and have black feet as my name tells you.
6. I am the largest and stockiest of the musky mammals. Two lighter stripes run down the sides of my shaggy fur coat. I have a nasty reputation because I am quite tough. I can scare mountain lions and bears away from their kills. I usually kill large rodents like beaver, but I can kill deer and elk if they are stuck in snow. I am secretive and very rare.
7. I am the musky mammal with a long skinny body and a very long tail. I can easily follow burrowing animals straight down into their burrows where I kill them with one swift bite to the back of the neck. I need to eat almost all of the time to keep warm because my long thin body loses a lot of heat.
8. My thick, lush chocolate brown fur has made me the musky mammal trappers have trapped throughout history. Now I am sometimes raised on commercial farms. In the wild I live near water and eat almost anything I can catch such as fish, frogs, turtles, snakes, mice, bats, earthworms and more.

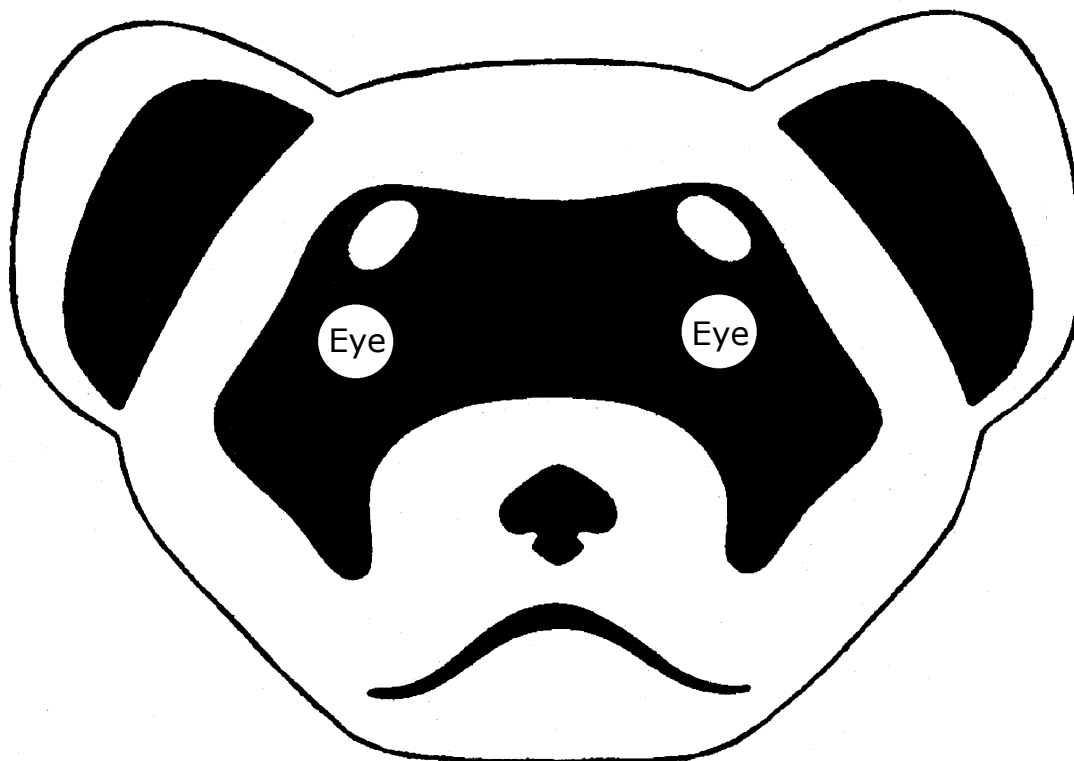
Answers: (top left to top right) 4. Pine Marten; 8. Wolverine; 5. Black-footed Ferret; 7. Long-tailed Weasel; 2. Badger; 1. River Otter; 3. Striped Skunk

Some of the musky mammals, like the black footed ferret, have unique patterns on their faces that set them apart. The black-footed wears a mask like a bandit. People wear masks, costumes and camouflage as ways to hide their true identity or to masquerade as someone, or something, they are not. Most kids, like you, know that people often wear masks on Halloween to disguise themselves. Sometimes people wear camouflage when hunting.

Animals have the colors and patterns they do for a reason too. The mask of the black-footed ferret is thought to help camouflage the ferret. Ferrets are most commonly observed peering out of prairie dog burrows with only their heads visible. In this posture, the black mask blurs the form of the ferret and makes it difficult to see. The ferret's black mask might also help reduce the glare from the light-colored soil in the areas where it lives. Badgers and skunks have unique face patterns too. What do you think the colors of a skunk might do?

Make a musky mammal mask for yourself by following the easy instructions below.

1. Have your teacher make a photocopy of the black-footed ferret mask pattern on this page. The pattern will need to be enlarged a little to fit your face.
2. Cut out your ferret mask.
3. Glue your ferret mask to a sheet of thicker paper like tag board. Cut around the edge of your ferret mask. Next, carefully cut out the circles for the eyes.
4. Attach a string or fine elastic cord to the sides of the mask by poking a small hole on each side and knotting the string through the hole. Adjust your mask to fit your face



5. Challenge yourself and make a badger or a skunk mask too!